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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fiftieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 538th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 6 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. PEREZ-HERNANDEZ Y TORRA (Spain)

later: Mr. KHORRAM (Islamic Republic of Iran)
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

ANNUAL THEME: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP TO ENSURE PROTECTION, ALSO IN RELATION TO SECURITY (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ANNUAL THEME: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP TO ENSURE PROTECTION, ALSO IN RELATION TO SECURITY (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/923)

1. Mr. N'GORAN-TECKLY (Observer for Côte d'Ivoire) said that the complexity of the crises which led to population movements was just one explanation for States' reluctance to grant asylum.

2. Security was of concern not only to States, but to the entire humanitarian community. It was of particular concern to refugees because their fundamental right to life and physical integrity was at stake.

3. His country advocated a legal approach to the issue, since the protection of refugees had to be anchored in law. States should therefore accede to international human rights and refugee law conventions and establish a legal framework which guaranteed respect for the principles they embodied. Decisions to expel refugees or asylum-seekers also had to have a legal basis and not be arbitrary or dictated by the whim of an official. It was important that countries should provide asylum-seekers with rapid procedures for the processing of their applications.

4. It was equally important for international organizations and non-governmental bodies to take Governments' anxiety about security seriously and adopt the necessary measures.

5. Côte d'Ivoire, which upheld the principles of non-refoulement and voluntary repatriation, continued to admit asylum-seekers from the two Congos, Rwanda and Burundi and was doing its best to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees. It was about to adopt national legislation on refugees.

6. Refugee protection called for joint, concerted action, but, in order to avoid waste and duplication, the role and mandate of each actor had to be defined. UNHCR's mandate had to be recognized and respected, and that meant that UNHCR had to have free access to refugees everywhere. Governments were nevertheless solely responsible for security measures.

7. Refugee protection was bound up with several other issues. Environmental protection and the rehabilitation of areas affected by the presence of refugees were abiding concerns. Efforts to develop the economies of the refugees' countries of asylum and of origin were the best means of offering post-conflict protection. Poor management during that period could spark off renewed wars. In that connection, he particularly welcomed moves to adopt stability pacts, which would, if they materialized, provide a legal framework for development schemes involving public and private sector actors. Such agreements would also strengthen and add substance to existing cooperation agreements.

8. In his country, which maintained a substantial military presence along the border with Liberia to prevent incursions by Liberian rebels who had killed nearly 100 Ivorians, partnership could have increased security for the thousands of refugees living outside camps.

9. Partnership should also help to marshal resources for programmes to provide practical assistance to refugees to enable them to become self-sufficient. The international community and donor countries had to ensure that responses were even-handed. Globalization should not be seen merely as an opportunity for trade; it also implied solidarity. If any refugees deserved special treatment, it was those in Africa, who had been taken in by countries that had enormous problems themselves.

10. Partnership which heightened the awareness of civil society and enabled Governments to deal with refugees effectively was the only way to meet the challenge of the related issues of protection and security.

11. Mr. SOLANO (Observer for Guinea) said that the annual theme had struck a chord with his country, which had taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing civil wars in neighbouring countries. That large-scale presence was weakening Guinea's ability to achieve its development targets. In fact, the country had received more refugees in proportion to its population than any other country in the world and its current, most urgent worry was security within its borders.

12. Since 1993, Guinea had suffered from repeated rebel incursions, which had heightened poverty and insecurity in some areas. Unless a solution was found, people in those areas might come to fear for their lives and property to such an extent that they would start rejecting refugees. It was therefore time for the international community to become more closely associated with the process of establishing peace in Sierra Leone and stability in Liberia.

13. His country strongly supported the idea of holding a peace conference under the auspices of UNHCR as a means of relieving tension, promoting the return of refugees to their countries of origin and introducing a pact of stability and solidarity between the four States concerned, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. The Executive Committee's meetings were the ideal place to launch an appeal for a coherent economic, political and military programme backed by international donors.

14. Refugee protection called for a structure of individual rights and duties and State responsibility. To that end, a bill on the status of refugees was going to be submitted to the Guinean National Assembly in the very near future. At the same time, his Government was determined to honour its commitments under international refugee conventions.

15. Crises in other parts of the world received far more attention from the international community than conflicts in Africa. That disparity was also reflected in the assistance given to refugees. Guinea might start to suffer from humanitarian fatigue if the international community continued to be so indifferent. Programmes therefore had to be implemented to compensate for the shortfall in aid to host countries. His Government hoped that the Executive Committee would support the special consultation on Guinea which was to be held in Brussels in November with a view to mitigating the consequences of the large-scale refugee presence in Guinea.

16. Mrs. ABOULNAGA (Observer for Egypt), welcoming the High Commissioner's efforts to promote the protection and safety of refugees, said that the worsening situation of refugees and displaced persons reflected the difficulties the international community faced in implementing the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

17. The protection of human beings was vital and defending their right to life was an international responsibility calling for cooperation and joint efforts. The annual theme was an indication of the urgency of the challenge created by the proliferation of conflicts.

18. Refugee protection depended on the political will of the international community and its fulfilment of the commitments it had undertaken. Her country considered that lasting solutions to the refugee problem required the strengthening of partnership, as well as international cooperation by Governments, United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations. Coordination and cooperation had to be the cornerstones of endeavours to reintegrate refugees and displaced persons in the economic and social fabric of their own countries.

19. Egypt believed that the efforts made by the international community and the United Nations to protect refugees had to be based on international law and the United Nations Charter and had to respect the sovereignty of States and the principle of non-interference.

20. The international community could not remain indifferent to flagrant violations of human rights and the rising number of victims of armed conflicts, but, if any joint international action was to be successful, it had to take account of the dividing lines between the mandates of United Nations agencies.

21. UNHCR had to use existing machinery and not introduce new mechanisms which would alter its humanitarian nature and turn it into a body for monitoring human rights violations, as had been suggested in paragraph 9 of document A/AC.96/923.

22. African States had a pioneering role to play in sharing responsibility for finding a solution to the plight of refugees and spreading the burden among host countries. It had been estimated that one third of the world's refugees were African. Africa therefore required more financial and technical assistance in order to cope with the strain and fulfil its responsibilities towards displaced persons. African countries hoped that such assistance would not be conditional on questions which had nothing to do with humanitarian issues.

23. The Kosovo crisis had illustrated the disparity between the volume of assistance given to refugees and displaced persons from that country and the amount of assistance offered to Africa. Statistics had shown that, for every dollar spent on a Kosovar refugee, only 11 cents were donated to an African refugee. That discrimination should shock the international community into an awareness of the need for greater equality in assistance to refugees and the victims of armed conflicts, regardless of political or geographical considerations.

24. No reference could be made to international solidarity without mentioning the financial problems of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which affected its operational capacity. She appealed to UNHCR to cooperate with UNRWA and welcomed cooperation between UNHCR and the Arab League.

25. Egypt appreciated UNHCR's efforts to guarantee the safety of refugees and displaced persons and to enable them to return home voluntarily and hoped that cooperation between UNHCR, United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations would continue. It condemned attacks on and the kidnapping of humanitarian personnel and supported UNHCR measures to combat such crimes.

26. Mr. MATLOU (South Africa) said that, despite the fact that Africa held one third of the world's refugee population, there was a deplorable shortfall in funding for the region, as compared with other parts of the world. It was essential to restructure the Western-dominated international refugee regime - including UNHCR - and define rules and responsibilities clearly, if the root causes of forced migration were to be tackled effectively. Human rights, democracy and good governance had been proclaimed the harbingers of the new world order, yet there was a reluctance to fund the structures, processes and procedures necessary to protect them.

27. South Africa had acceded to the main international and regional conventions on refugees shortly after the new Government had taken office in 1994. The next step in providing legal and physical protection to asylum-seekers and refugees had been to promulgate the 1998 Refugees Act, covering reception and protection of asylum-seekers, processing of asylum applications, and refugees' rights and obligations. Regulations under the Act were currently being formulated in order to make it fully operational.

28. In institutional terms, the National Consortium of Refugee Affairs (NCRA) focused on the development of policy on refugees and standards for the provision of basic services.

29. Protection was not only a matter for legislative and institutional measures, however. It must also come from within the community, as the product of an understanding of the root causes of refugee situations, the social acceptance of refugees and an acknowledgement that the phenomenon was likely to continue for some time. In South Africa, recent threats to refugees' safety and security, involving agents from the countries of origin and local criminal elements, were being dealt with in decisive fashion. However, the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees had to be balanced with responsibilities: the involvement of refugee groups in criminal activities, for example, could not be tolerated.

30. His Government was considering establishing short-stay reception centres in order to speed up the processing of the tens of thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees who came from more than a hundred countries, and to minimize security risks, racketeering and corruption.

31. Many of those seeking asylum in South Africa came through safe countries where they could secure protection, but it seemed they were denied protection or not properly advised. The international system of protection was based on

the principle of burden-sharing. UNHCR should invest in a robust, functioning refugee regime across Africa in order to help all the States in the region to meet their obligations.

32. A more proactive approach had to be taken to addressing the root causes of refugee crises, including making material improvements in living standards. South Africa was involved in multilateral efforts at peacekeeping, peacemaking and conflict resolution in Africa and elsewhere. He urged UNHCR to help bring about the implementation of its memorandum of understanding with SADC and to cooperate more closely with OAU, particularly on capacity-building projects to enable African countries handle refugee crises better.

33. Ms. BIKÉ (Observer for Gabon) said that peace was the key to solving refugees' problems. Her country worked tirelessly at conflict resolution and peacekeeping in the subregion and beyond, attempting to build confidence, consensus and dialogue. Gabon had invested wholeheartedly in the implementation of early warning conflict prevention mechanisms in central Africa and in the establishment of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX). The President had recently presented to other heads of State of the subregion the idea of setting up a humanitarian affairs office for Africa under the auspices of OAU and the United Nations. With the advantage of local knowledge, such an office could serve as a focal point for rapid intervention and coordination of aid to refugees. At the regional level, the last OAU summit in Algiers had committed itself to prioritizing peaceful conflict resolution and had agreed that the African mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution was of enormous value.

34. Gabon welcomed the help UNHCR had provided in dealing with the thousands of Congolese refugees arriving at the border in a state of total exhaustion. Refugees continued to arrive from Congo and elsewhere.

35. The strengthening of partnership for protection was recognized by all to be an urgent necessity, but how could developing countries, with their economic problems and armed conflicts, be active partners in dealing with mass inflows of refugees if they were not given the logistical means to ensure the safety of vulnerable groups such as women and children? The international community must ensure that all refugees, from the north or the south, received equal treatment.

36. Mr. TEPER (Kenya) said that threats to refugees' security and host countries' peace and stability came either from refugees' countries of origin or from within host countries themselves. The task was therefore to create conditions in which refugees could return in safety and dignity. Kenya itself had experienced the effects of disturbances in neighbouring countries. The long period of lawlessness in Somalia, for example, had forced many Somalis into Kenya, and Kenya's own national security had then been threatened as banditry and criminal activities had spilled over as well. Attempts had been made, with UNHCR's help, to protect both Kenyans and refugees by increasing the numbers of security personnel. In addition, the border had recently had to be closed in order to protect the refugees and the country, although Somali asylum-seekers were still welcome in Kenya. He called for a concerted effort to help rebuild Somalia and restore authority there. Effective return and settlement had been achieved far more rapidly in many other areas.

37. Armed conflicts were leading to a proliferation of arms; weapons were being taken across borders and into countries that were free of conflict. Kenya was organizing a conference on the problem and called for assistance in reducing the numbers of arms in the region.

38. The President of Kenya was to chair initiatives on conflict resolution in the Sudan, carrying on Kenya's tradition of bringing dissenting factions within countries together to negotiate.

39. Kenya and its partners in the refugee programme had instituted a mobile court that toured refugee camps to hear cases in which refugees had been the victims of crimes. Some groups were of course more vulnerable than others, but the court had proved a deterrent to such crimes. He paid tribute to the countries that had facilitated the resettlement of vulnerable groups and individuals in order to ensure their security and protection.

40. It had not been easy for Kenya to maintain its open-door policy in the absence of domestic legislation on refugees. He was therefore pleased to announce that a draft bill was soon to be debated in Parliament. Kenya was also working with its partners to issue all refugees with identity cards in order to help in registration and to protect them from unnecessary hardship. Lastly, he thanked the UNHCR offices in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, their partners and other humanitarian organizations, for their help in repatriating Kenyan refugees in Ethiopia and providing them with essentials such as water and shelter.

41. Mr. SOMOL (Observer for the Czech Republic) said that, during the Kosovo crisis, his country had been effectively involved in the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme by transporting Kosovar refugees and providing them with temporary refuge. Thanks to UNHCR support, the programme had been implemented in an efficient and speedy manner. A few weeks before the beginning of the current session of the Executive Committee, the programme of voluntary repatriation had been successfully completed, all Kosovar refugees wishing to do so having now returned home.

42. The UNHCR office in Prague and the IOM representation had greatly contributed to the success of the whole humanitarian operation in the Czech Republic, as well as of the repatriation exercise. His country was continuing to implement the programme of medical evacuation for persons who could not be treated in Kosovo and had also made contributions both in cash and in kind to UNHCR operations in the region. His delegation, convinced of the usefulness of properly coordinated international cooperation and partnership, congratulated UNHCR on the way in which it had fulfilled its tasks during the Kosovo crisis and welcomed the evaluation process taking place with a view to future improvements.

43. During the past year, his Government had given special attention to the question of asylum procedures, introducing a number of structural changes in line with the process of the Czech Republic's association with the European Union. Today, the largest groups of asylum seekers in the Czech Republic came from Afghanistan, India and Sri Lanka. The primary goal of the State programme for recognized refugees, which was being implemented in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, was the refugees' full

integration in society leading eventually to the acquisition of Czech citizenship. A new draft asylum act based on the relevant legislation in countries of Western Europe was currently under discussion in Parliament an was expected to enter into force on 1 January 2000. The Czech Republic was also preparing to accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

44. Ms. PICTET-ALTHANN (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malt said that, during the Kosovo crisis, the Austrian branch of the Order of Ma had set up a camp for some 3,000 refugees in Albania, where the security of both refugees and humanitarian workers had been successfully ensured thanks the Austrian Government's decision to include military personnel in the operational structure. Another refugee camp organized by the Order's Emergency Corps at the request of UNHCR had been plundered by criminal grou While she fully agreed with the High Commissioner that the military could support, but should not seek to replace agencies with humanitarian mandates, she wished to place on record that, in the former of the above-mentioned tw cases, partnership between civilian and military institutions had greatly benefited the protection of refugees and humanitarian staff.

45. In Africa, the Order had carried out a number of projects for UNHCR, including several in the Great Lakes region, and was continuing its assista in Uganda, southern Sudan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its cooperation in the Balkans had shifted from providing assistance to refugees to reconstructing villages and local infrastructures for returnees. Work on the "Bosnian Women's Initiative" was continuing jointly with UNHCR a a similar structure was being set up in Kosovo. There was also a possibilit of the Order's Emergency Corps becoming involved in humanitarian action in East Timor, particularly in connection with the Order's hospitaller traditi The Order of Malta, which was celebrating its ninth centenary during the current year, was determined to pursue its charitable work for the sick, the needy and refugees without distinction of religion, race, origin or age.

46. Mr. Khorram (Vice-Chairman) took the Chair.

47. Mr. COX (Observer for New Zealand) said that, in addition to supportin the work of humanitarian agencies providing assistance to persons displaced from East Timor, his country had decided to provide temporary refuge to 300 displaced persons from that territory. New Zealand defence personnel we taking part in the United Nations-mandated international force which was creating conditions for the secure return of the population. Earlier in the year, New Zealand had also offered refuge to 600 Kosovar Albanians in need o humanitarian assistance.

48. The events of 1999 had highlighted the importance of collective action to protect the interests of ordinary people caught up in conflicts of variou kinds. The international community had been called upon to provide legal, physical and material protection on a large scale. Effective action called for the underpinning of established internationally recognized principles as well as the establishment of working partnerships between Governments, international agencies such as UNHCR, and civil society. Full and unfettere access to vulnerable groups in need of assistance was, of course, essential, as was the provision of security for humanitarian workers.

49. An issue of particular concern to the Asia-Pacific region was that of irregular migration and human trafficking. Many countries were faced with escalating attempts to abuse the institution of asylum for illegal migration purposes. His country welcomed regional initiatives for constructive solutions to the problems arising from that situation. On 1 October 1999, it had amended its immigration laws to provide a more streamlined response to genuine asylum-seekers. Conditions for the expeditious processing of unfounded spontaneous asylum claimants had been implemented with a view to safeguarding the interests of persons in genuine need of protection. UNHCR's advice and support in developing the new legislation had been invaluable.

50. Prince SOBANDLA (Observer for Swaziland), referring to recent developments in the SADC subregion, said that a conference on security had been held in Swaziland, an economic development meeting had been organized in South Africa and the multimillion-dollar Maguga project had been commissioned to provide irrigation schemes for countries in the subregion, especially Mozambique. A quadrilateral meeting on refugee and asylum issues involving the Governments of Swaziland, Mozambique and South Africa and the local and regional office of UNHCR had been held in 1998.

51. In the light of recent events in Europe and Asia, the man in the street in Africa felt that no one cared for him. The world appeared to be focusing its attention on some areas only, while doing little about the tragedies in Somalia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other parts of Africa, many of which were not of Africa's own making. There was a growing perceived notion that Africa was being left alone to solve its own problems. The disparity and visible imbalance in terms of international focus and assistance between refugees in Africa and elsewhere in the world needed to be urgently redressed. UNHCR programmes for Africa should receive similar attention as other programmes elsewhere. Special envoys of the High Commissioner should be deployed in high-profile conflict situations in Africa in the same way as they had been in Kosovo. Efforts by African leaders not only to bring about the peaceful resolution of ongoing conflicts, but also to address their root causes, had to be complemented by action on the part of the international community in a spirit of burden-sharing. His country joined in the call for preventive measures, also known as "soft options". He paid a special tribute to the work done by the Roman Catholic bishop in his country and the general secretary of Swaziland's human rights organization, as well as to UNHCR field workers, and confirmed his Government's commitment to the protection of refugees, as well as of UNHCR staff in the country.

52. Ms. ČEH (Observer for Croatia) said that many forms of cooperation with UNHCR and other intergovernmental organizations had been introduced and implemented by her Government in order to alleviate short-term problems during the refugee crisis in Croatia and a wide range of cooperation measures had been applied following the cessation of hostilities with a view to attaining a durable solution for the largest possible number of refugees, with particular emphasis on helping refugees to return to their homes.

53. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Croatia had had some 350,000 refugees and displaced persons in its territory. As a result of four years of concerted effort, 226,000 refugees and displaced persons had returned to their homes in Croatia, while 79,000 still enjoyed refugee status.

The returnees included 34,000 persons who had returned to Croatia from abroad. UNHCR, OSCE and other international agencies had been actively involved at all stages of the return process. International monitors had also contributed to the drafting of a series of legislative acts designed to help to establish an appropriate legal basis for facilitating the return process and to alleviate administrative obstacles. The membership of the implementing bodies for the act or regulations concerned included representatives of international organizations operating in Croatia, who not only cooperated with the Government, but also frequently acted as coordinators. For example, UNHCR and OSCE were the Government's partners in a Return Facilitation Group and UNHCR was involved in the so-called Article 11 Commission under the Erdut Agreement with the European Union. Cooperation was also being practised on a bilateral basis, as shown by the cross-border institutional relationship between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

54. In areas where the return process was still continuing or had been completed, Croatia had given particular care to the security issue. For example, it had accepted a continuing United Nations and, later, OSCE presence in Eastern Slovenia with a view to supporting the creation of a secure environment for the return of refugees and displaced persons in the Croatian Danube region. The performance of the local police in Eastern Slovenia, characterized by its mixed ethnic structure and its extensive training by the United Nations and OSCE, had been widely praised.

55. Another area closely linked to the issue of security and the return of refugees where international support and cooperation with the host country were critical to the success of the return process was that of mine clearance.

56. Notwithstanding certain shortcomings and misunderstandings, Croatia believed its partnership with the international community in respect of the return process to have been generally positive. While security was an essential element, it was equally important to develop other forms of partnership, especially in the field of economic and social development, in order to ensure that the return process became self-sustaining. In particular, she stressed the importance of taking objective and effective burden-sharing measures for the economic recovery of areas to which refugees were returning and of enhancing the role of economic institutions.

57. So far as the Kosovo crisis was concerned, Croatia had taken part in UNHCR's Humanitarian Evacuation Programme, had accepted individuals applying for refuge outside the UNHCR project and had donated bilateral assistance to Albania and Macedonia, the two countries most affected by the crisis. Today, Croatia was preparing to participate in a new form of partnership under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, a regional initiative which, it believed, would contribute to the long-term stabilization of the region. Refugee issues were among those to be specifically addressed in that connection.

58. Mr. ALVAREZ GONZALEZ SAN MARTIN (Spain) said his country wished to add a number of points to those made on behalf of the European Union by the representative of Finland. In the last year, the refugee situation had not changed in either quantitative or qualitative terms. The root cause was still

gross violations - in many cases deliberate and systematic - of the most basic human rights. In political terms, protection essentially meant preventing conflict by eliminating its causes.

59. Europe had had its share of challenges in the past year: the Kosovo crisis had produced 800,000 internally displaced persons and refugees by June 1999 and the subsequent return of the vast majority of those had then given rise to further involuntary displacements of minority populations such as Serbs or Roma, swelling the already huge numbers of displaced persons and refugees in Serbia who had fled the conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia.

60. With its blend of protection, security and humanitarian coordination issues, Kosovo could serve as preparation for the international community in dealing with similar situations in East Timor or, possibly, the Caucasus.

61. Spain supported the principle that, without exception, the State where asylum or refuge was sought had the primary responsibility for protecting refugees. In addition to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the Executive Committee's annual compilation of its annual conclusions over the last 25 years constituted an invaluable body of case law. It was also important for new forms of protection - notably temporary protection - to be discussed alongside other durable solutions. That subject was being seriously considered by the European Union.

62. Children, women and old people had borne the brunt of the crisis in Kosovo, thereby justifying UNHCR's focus on cross-cutting gender- and age-related themes and the use of gender and age as selection criteria in the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme, alongside family unity. The evacuation programme had proved to be a model of effective partnership in which Spain had played a key role.

63. Protection also entailed better coordination at Headquarters and in the field, the possibility of access to persons in need of humanitarian assistance and enhanced cooperation between UNHCR and Governments. The peacekeeping contingents provided by Governments often had an implicitly humanitarian role to play. The security of refugees and humanitarian workers was another legitimate concern, which could be addressed by a fuller exchange of information, genuine partnership and more effective forward planning and forecasting. Spain had also been active in drafting the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and had made significant financial contributions to the work of the United Nations in Kosovo and East Timor.

64. His delegation was pleased to report that Spanish civil society had responded generously to a number of recent humanitarian crises, a commitment paralleled only by the Spanish Government's financial contributions to UNHCR.

65. Mr. [illegible] (Hungary) said that Hungary had experienced at first hand the results of ethnic cleansing, nationalism and xenophobia in neighbouring countries. Over the past decade, and with the assistance of UNHCR, his Government had provided protection to more than 150,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. Illegal migration was a growing problem in Hungary because it posed a direct threat to public safety and increased the financial

burden on the State. The Government had recently completed a major overhaul of its immigration and asylum laws, its procedures for handling aliens and the administrative structures for dealing with immigrants. The purpose of the reform was to create adequate conditions for the civilized and humane accommodation of foreigners, and especially to provide proper treatment for vulnerable categories of refugees and asylum-seekers.

66. More than 5,000 Kosovars had taken refuge in Hungary as a result of the crisis in the region. In addition, thousands of ethnic Serbs, Hungarians and other nationalities had flooded into Hungary. Because it wished to be an effective and reliable partner in protecting refugees, Hungary had been the first country in the region to accede to the 1951 Convention.

67. Mr. IBRAIMI (Observer for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, during the Kosovo crisis, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had received over 360,000 refugees. They had been variously accommodated in refugee camps, with local families or evacuated to third countries. His Government warmly appreciated the international assistance that had been made available. As a special form of international solidarity, humanitarian evacuation to third countries should always be an option when a host country was faced with a mass influx of refugees. As soon as the troops of the International Security Force (KFOR) had entered Kosovo, the refugees had started to return. However, a certain number of refugees with unsatisfactory living conditions in Kosovo were continuing to lodge temporarily with families in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on humanitarian grounds.

68. There were currently some 35,000 Kosovar refugees remaining in Macedonia and, as a result of recent events, ethnic Serb and Roma refugees were starting to arrive. Their numbers currently stood at approximately 4,500. Steps were being taken to prepare those populations for the winter.

69. The Blace border crossing between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo had originally been constructed for the needs of the Macedonian economy alone. It was currently being used by KFOR troops, international humanitarian organizations and Macedonian commercial traffic. Delays were commonplace. Despite his Government's repeated appeals, no action had been taken to solve that practical problem.

70. Mr. ILLANES (Observer for Chile) said that, having expressed its desire to participate in UNHCR's resettlement programmes, his Government had recently signed a framework agreement with UNHCR to host a group of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The refugees had subsequently arrived in June. His Government was convinced that intermediate developing countries could make a positive contribution to humanitarian efforts.

71. Human security was dependent on the promotion and enforcement of human rights and humanitarian law, democratic governance, the establishment of a culture of peace and the peaceful solution of conflicts. Awareness-raising activities and the requisite political will were also important elements, as was partnership between Governments, the private sector and civil society.

72. Chile wished to intensify its cooperation with UNHCR and had therefore requested membership of the Executive Committee. It also intended to double its financial contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner and would push for the prompt domestic ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

73. Mr. ABALO (Observer for Benin) said that the Partnership in Action (PARinAC) process for Benin was slowly but surely consolidating the work of UNHCR in his country. Some 150,000 asylum-seekers had arrived in Benin in 1993 as a result of wars in neighbouring countries; today that total had been reduced to just 6,000 officially recognized refugees and 1,000 asylum-seekers. The significant decrease was the result of a successful partnership between the Beninese Government, UNHCR, international organizations and NGOs. A resettlement programme had been launched the previous year, the key components of which were efforts to raise the awareness of the authorities and civil society regarding the desirability of resettling refugees, and the mobilization of development partners. A refugee accommodation centre built with assistance from development partners was due to open its doors shortly. Its purpose was to train refugees to grow their own food and to foster their intellectual, spiritual and moral development.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.